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National preparedness:

an open letter to His Excellency
the President of the United States
of America.

Philadelphia, 1916.



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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS



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Henry A. Bomberger

AN OPEN LETTER

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

THE PRESIDENT OF

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS.

*An Open Letter to His Excellency
The President of the United States.*

Sir.—

As a man, and as an American citizen, you no doubt accept the principle and enter heartily into the spirit of "national preparedness for war." The statement is made without qualification because from time immemorial man as man has invariably accepted this principle, and the citizenry of the world without exception has always entered thus into this same spirit.

For this very reason, therefore, your humble correspondent, and dutiful servant, does not oppose the principle of "national preparedness for war" merely as man to man, nor does he at this time question the spirit of "national preparedness for war" merely as fellow-citizens of a great nation counsel with each other.

But I respectfully appeal to you, Sir, as a Christian—more than a mere man—yea, more than an American citizen—though a better man and a truer, greater citizen for all that.

Not since the sun first rose on lost Paradise, after man had been cast out into a world thenceforth rent with strife and torn with war, has any human being faced the opportunity that today cries aloud for admission at the gates of your house.

The people of this peaceful and prosperous land have appointed you their leader, their executive, their exemplar, the commander-in-chief of their hopes and fears, of all they hold sacred and dear. As a nation, in the providence of God we stand in every respect supreme among the great powers of earth—in the extent of our domain and the inestimable value of our national resources, in the number and character of our united people (most of whom, or whose forebears, came to these gracious shores to escape so-called “preparedness for war,” its concomitant evils and logical consequences), in commerce and education, in political constitution and pure religion, in peaceful purposes and unparalleled liberties, fortified on our eastern and western borders by great and practically impregnable seas, buttressed on the north by arctic cold and on the south by tropic heat.

Meanwhile, the outside nations, all previously “prepared” for war, though in varying degree (as the case must ever be), are arrayed against each other in the most bitter, sanguinary and inexcusable conflict that history records. The full-armed cohorts of hell have been let loose—heresy and hate, the unchecked lust of blood, of territorial expansion, commercial supremacy and temporal power—in self-evident contravention of the best interests of humanity, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, man’s inalienable rights—unbridled envy and enmity discovering themselves in unspeakably malignant, noisome passion, while the destructive scourge of starvation and pestilence threatens to finish in horror the frenzied debauch.

In such a case as this, to which cause will so-called victory come? To the cause of justice and righteousness? Or to the cause that can continue longest to muster and maintain “the heaviest battalions”?—Do tell, is this the way, by display of

sheer brute force, in which to secure that much-vaunted "righteous" peace, or to avoid the strange sophistry of that so-called "unrighteous" peace?—There is no such thing as unrighteous "peace"—such peace is but smoldering strife.—Shall we do evil that good may come of it? God forbid.—Or, if good may come of evil, is this the wisest and best way in which to attain the good? Shall we have peace because we fear each other, or because we "love one another, and so fulfill the law of Christ"?

Socalled "national preparedness for war," in any view of it—however good the mere phrase may sound in some superficial or itching ears—is only an utter deceit and a merciless farce; for no nation can be said to be effectually "prepared," in the sense intended, until it is more fully prepared than every other prepared nation; so that every chapter of the vast volume of this "preparedness" simply leads to another larger chapter in endless succession.—Moreover, the command "Ready!" has ever been easily and quickly followed by the command to "Fire!"—Preparedness and Prussianism are synonymous terms.—Therefore "preparedness" is all a rude joke, Sir—especially jolly, I should say, to the steel and munition interests of the country—while the oppressed and misguided people pay the staggering price!

Furthermore, I am well aware that the logic of disarmament leads directly to the abandonment of the so-called police powers generally.—Very well, let it be so—and may heaven hasten the day! The safest and happiest people in this land are not those whose habit it has been to sleep with police pistols under their pillows, burglar alarms on their door-posts and a special officer constantly on the corner. And the most secure and peaceful sections of this country even now are to be found where saloons and jails have practically passed into history and a

policeman would now be simply an interesting curiosity.

Bad as we are we are not as far removed after all from the conditions that constitute an ideal state as some prophets of evil, whose spirit of self-aggrandizement is constantly "seeing things," would have us think.—All of which leads to a series of considerations worth while, a simple example of which may be found in the fact that if the entire police force of our own city of Philadelphia were immediately abolished two-thirds of the political corruption, that has made this city a by-word of reproach throughout this nation, would be gone with the police—so much at least.—Therefore those who think that our police powers, as at present constituted, are an unmixed blessing, are asleep, biased, or the sad victims of distorted vision—or their wits are wool-gathering.

But however all this may be, I frankly and respectfully submit that we must either abandon our professions of Christianity or stop this militaristic clap-trap.

From a child, Sir, you have been brought up in the knowledge and testimony of the living God, in the love and doctrine of Jesus Christ. Speak, I pray you—speak the word of welcome to waiting opportunity—grasp her outstretched, pleading hand—and let that word be high as heaven, and that grasp as strong as the mighty bulwarks of the eternal God. Speak, Sir—and let the word ring true and beautiful above the noxious smoke of battle, the belching roar of howitzer, the crash of bursting shrapnel, the shrieks of dying men, the anguish-cry of outraged women and children, the moans of the widow and fatherless.

O, my God!—Shall this Christian nation and its Christian president discount brutal bloodshed, commercialize the frightful misfortunes of mankind and make hilarious capital out of the savage onslaught of

the contending factions? Shall our boasted American eagle be transformed now into naught but a hungry, voracious buzzard, gorging and fattening itself on the carrion dead of European battlefields? Shall the divine light of our liberty now become only the flickering lantern of some ghoul seeking gangrened booty and enrichment among the rotting sepulchres of the nations we are wont to call our friends?

Put up thy sword, Sir, into his place—for war is hell—and the nation that takes the sword, shall perish with the sword. It is as true in history as in Sacred Writ.

Dare you now venture even the suggestion that this is simply the idle prattle of some hair-brained theorist, or the blathering of some impractical, visionary doctrinaire? In His day and generation it was with impunity said to be such. But may that characterization endure after the test of twenty centuries?

What think you?—Men come and go, philosophies rise and fall, science staggers and stumbles, nations flourish and vanish—but the cross still stands!—the cross, with its ignominy and shame—the cross, with its unpreparedness and pain—the cross, with its defencelessness and dishonor—the cross, with its mockery and death—the cross, on which He, or the nation, lifted up, draws all men with the irresistible power of Almighty God—the cross, with its ineffable love of mankind—the cross, with its impelling, propitiatory sacrifice—the cross, as great for the community as for the individual—the cross—still—stands!

By that sign conquer, Sir—and never in this wild world by the sign of pounds sterling, French 75's or German howitzers.

I say, Sir, that rather than this, let this blessed nation be crucified, dead and buried—it would soon

rise again to win the world more mightily and certainly to its sublime standard of righteousness and peace, equality and fraternity—and not all the clanking legions of hell itself could stop that resurrection.—If that be treason, make the most of it.

Let it be said that these are but the vain ravings of a neurotic—it has often been said, even of the world's greatest, bravest and best. Let the worldly-wise man wag his head—let a Godless, conceited, arrogant philosophy swagger, sneer and scoff—and let this preaching of crucifixion continue to be a stumblingblock to one and foolishness to another—it is nevertheless the power of God, and has proved itself to be the wisdom of God.

Where today is the haughty Roman soldier, full-armed and ready, who pierced the unshielded side of Him they crucified? Where today is the vaunted, well-prepared empire of the Caesars who abetted that soldier's damnable deed? The world has never since known such extended domain, or wealth, or power. Where is it all today?

But that selfsame cross still stands—commanding untold trusty legions in every land and clime, the unarmored forces of the Prince of Peace, yet the mightiest forces ever marshalled any where. For, behold! the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is mightier than men; for God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.

I therefore humbly pray you, Sir—be the wise champion of that foolishness, the strong adherent of that weakness.

The so-called “national honor” has been little more in the experience of men than a scandalous, crush-

ing Juggernaut; and the socalled "patriotism" of men has been little more than a hungry, heartless Moloch. Yet the most distinguished Jew that illustrious people has ever produced, who has done most for real national honor, and has really glorified pure patriotism, gave Himself up, all unarmed, to scornful crucifixion.

But suppose Japan should attack us on our western seaboard?—Pardon my simplicity, my apparent lack of political sagacity and statesmanship—but, on that ground, Japan would not attack us on our western seaboard, nor elsewhere; or, if she did, she would perish by her own sword; or, more likely, before her superdreadnaughts had fairly entered the Golden Gate, Japan would be on her knees, a grateful suppliant instead of an angry adversary.—I believe that. Is that faith foolishness?

But suppose Germany should attack us on our eastern seaboard?—But, under such conditions, Germany would not attack us on our eastern seaboard, nor elsewhere; or, if she did, she would perish by her own hand, as Rome did; or, more likely, before her tremendous war machine had been landed within our coasts, Germany would bow in submission before the super-strength of the innocent, defenceless, uplifted one—I believe that. Is that faith fanaticism?

Yet it is not for me, Sir, to discuss with Your Excellency such matters of state as these. Much less would your dutiful correspondent boast any peculiar virtue of his own. Alas! he has no virtue to boast of. As a man, in hot haste, I, too, would no doubt draw the prepared and all too ready sword, as one did of old at the garden gate when they came with swords and staves to take Him, all "unprepared," to judgment and ignominious sacrifice.—It is not I, myself, speaking, therefore—either as a man or as a citizen—but my religion. I can myself go into the trenches, and it may be take my

religion with me; but never in this world can I take these savage trenches into my religion. My religion is paramount—both my manhood and my citizenship must come up to its standard, else all three are but vanity.

I would therefore simply state the undisputed principle and voice the unquestioned spirit of our common Christianity.

With one of your distinguished predecessors in the presidency of this nation, both professors of that Christianity, I am advised that you recently turned back from the historic record of Christianity, as found in the New Testament scriptures, to the Old Testament record of a decadent Judaism in search of some authoritative justification for the propaganda of "national preparedness for war"—just as the Mormons were wont to turn back to the patriarchs for some scriptural warrant for polygamy—the slightest justification or warrant for either of which I respectfully challenge you or any living man to produce from the scriptures of the New Testament, the only accredited historic record of Jesus Christ.

Your same honored predecessor is reported to have said that "this country was made inhabitable by war."—Suppose it was; might there not have been a far better, a Christian way, of making it inhabitable?—But it was not.—Permit me to say that I cannot understand how any one possessed of so great a degree of honesty, and intelligent discernment of all the facts, could make a statement so contrary to the facts. The simple historic truth is that this country came near to being made uninhabitable by war.—Yet I do not catch the drift of that strange statement. If the reference is to our early Indian wars, its author cites one of the blackest and most damning pages in the history of the American people. If the reference is to the European wars that drove our early colonists to seek the asylum of

these foreign shores, an indictment is presented of the supreme folly and wickedness of war that it would be difficult to equal. If the reference is to our Revolutionary war, the statement certainly calls for some very sweeping qualifications.

In any event, the mailed fist belongs—to Christianity, never!—but to the barbarism of alien idolatries.

Physical bigness is not fundamental—except in brutes; the only fundamental thing, for men and nations, is righteousness, moral bigness—it cannot be moved, its seeming defeat is only a passing illusion. Submission constructs its own sepulcher, it may be, in the divinely mysterious metamorphoses of human life; but a little later it comes forth again, not crawling, but with golden wings. The true wisdom and power of the world manifest themselves, not in deadly weapons and munitions of war, but in lowly mangers and on life's Calvaries.—Here only are true courage and heroism.—A floating fort of massive steel has by no means the structural strength, neither the defensive nor offensive effectiveness, and carries neither the honor nor the patriotism, of a simple beatitude woven into the fabric of individual and civic life.—I would rather be right and be wrecked than be a conqueror in the wrong. And mere human philosophy has again revealed itself as nothing more nor less than an indistinct, tortuous calf-path, starting in some sequestered haystack and leading farther and farther into the dense, briar-infested, hopelessly tangled undergrowth of an ever darker, savage jungle.

A bigger muscle, a stronger back, or a stouter club does not denote the pathway to permanent peace—never did—and never will! The fighting edge of carnal kingdoms has no part at all in the peaceful conquests of the gracious scepter of Jesus Christ.—“My Kingdom,” said He, “is not of this world, else would my servants fight.”

I will agree that our professed Christianity is indeed, at every point and in every respect, paradoxical—and humanly speaking a laughing-stock. Its distinguishing tenets, its fundamental ideas, its essential doctrines, its ways and means, are diametrically opposed, it is quite true, to every human hypothesis.—Let it be so.

Nevertheless, “resist not evil”—and evil will explode itself only to destroy itself, and without ultimate damage to any save itself.—Is this, too, foolishness? If it is, the laugh is, not on me, but on Him.

But try it, Sir. Man, alas, has had at least sixty centuries of the other thing, let us now try this, in truth, for only sixty years—nay, sixty months! Let us turn the other cheek, Sir—for the man or the nation that is wise enough in its folly to learn, strong enough in its wisdom to live, that lesson, will abide in ever increasing wisdom, honor and strength.

Therefore, while my poor humanity cries aloud for more ships, and still more ships—larger armies and still more guns—my religion would sink every one of those infernal instruments of human wickedness, cowardice and folly, in the unsounded depths of the sea, put every soldier to the plow, convert every gun into a garden hose, and cast all our so-called coast defenses into the bottomless pit whence they were dug.

For God still lives, and righteousness still reigns supreme above all the devilish din of war and the unsheathed teeth of brute beasts.

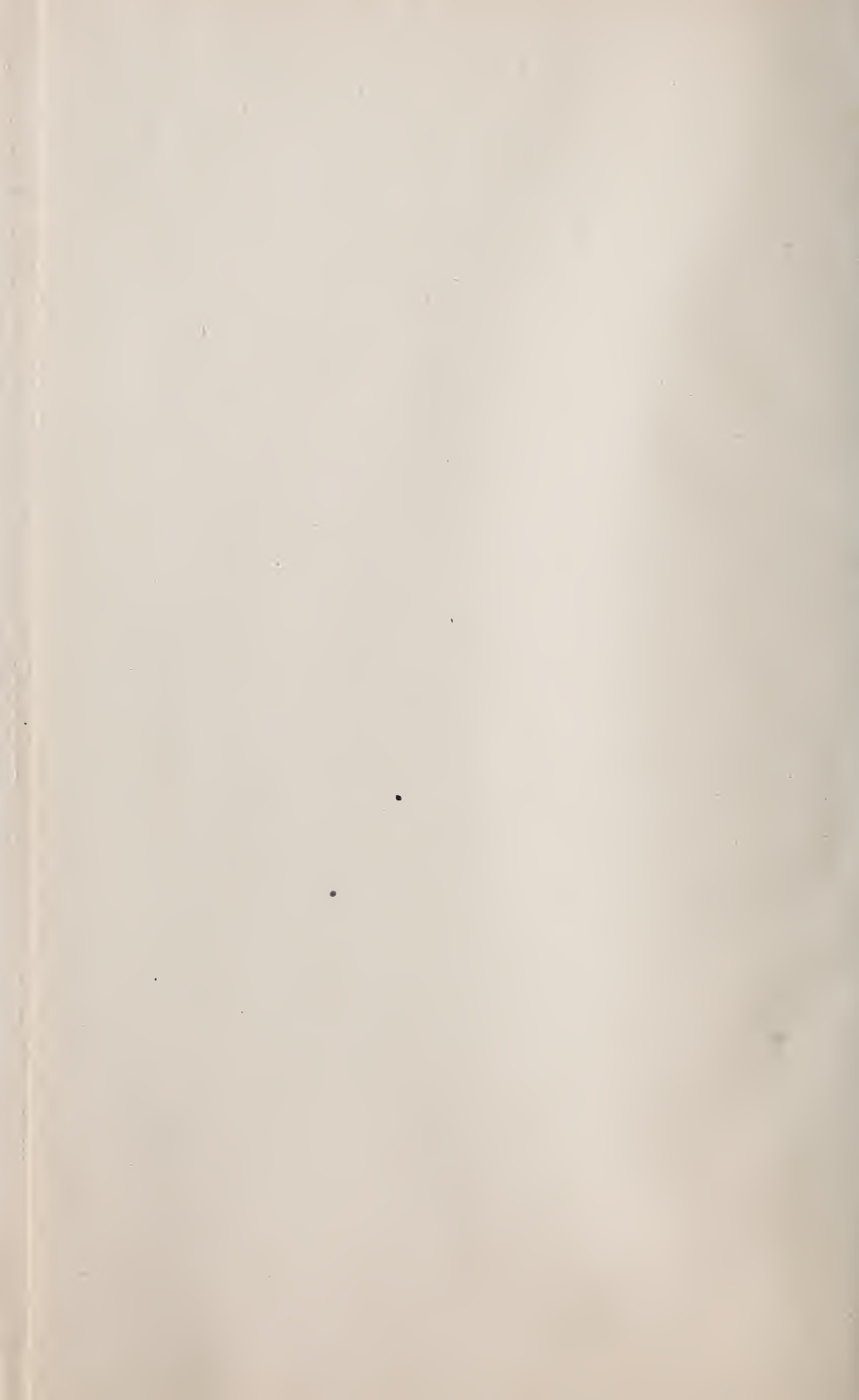
With every consideration, etc., I beg to remain
Respectfully yours,

HENRY A. BOMBERGER.

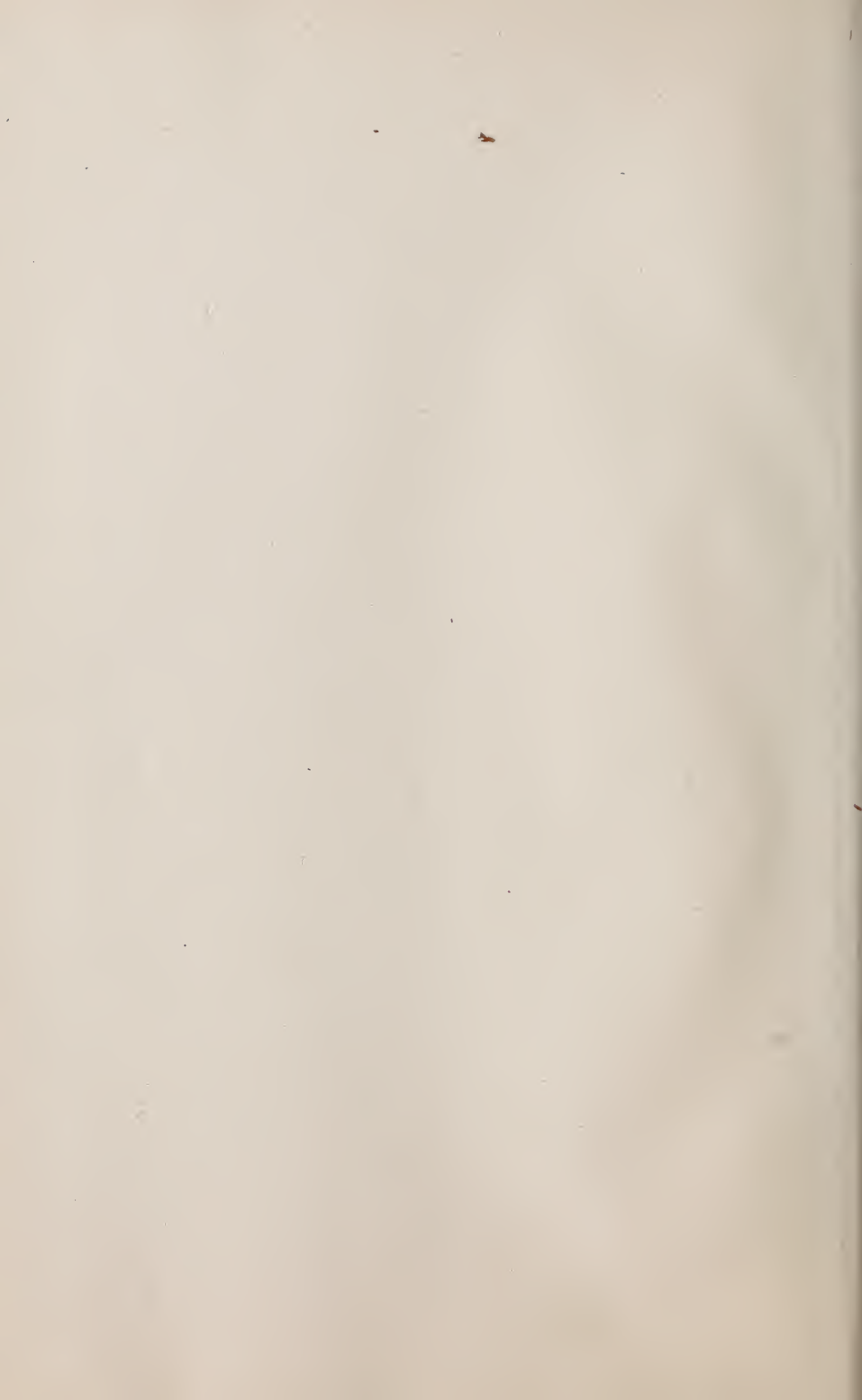
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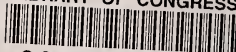
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